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Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

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**Testimony of
Michelle Noehren
Legislative Liaison & Events Coordinator
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Select Committee on Children
Tuesday, February 23, 2010**

SB 153

In Support of: S.B. 153, AA Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of ~~S.B. 153~~, AA Providing a Safe Harbor for Exploited Children.

PCSW chairs and convenes the Trafficking in Persons Council, which was originally established in 2004 to study the issue of human trafficking and make recommendations to the Legislature. The Legislature enacted several Council recommendations into law, and as a result Connecticut has criminal and civil penalties for the crime of trafficking.

Despite the implementation of these laws, trafficked children are not fully protected from criminal penalties. Currently although children under the age of 16 cannot consent to sex, they can be prosecuted for prostitution. Additionally, the "raise the age" legislation helps children from being prosecuted as adults; however it does not prevent them from being prosecuted as juvenile delinquents.

S.B. 153 will address this problem by establishing a presumption that a person, who is under the age of 17 and being prosecuted for prostitution, is a victim of trafficking. This bill would acknowledge that commercially sexually exploited and trafficked children are better served in community counseling and shelter program rather than juvenile justice lock-up facilities.

This bill compliments the intent of the anti-trafficking statutes by protecting, rather than punishing, victims of trafficking. We appreciate your attention to this matter.